

Why Morris Matters

IN THE LAST issue of the *Journal* I posed a competition conundrum: 'why does Morris matter?' in 50 words or less. Whilst there weren't lots of entries, those there were were universally good – so good that I reproduce them all below. Readers may also be interested to know that these quotes were blown up on to coloured sheets of paper and used as part of the 'décor' in the building where the *Morris in the 21st Century* Conference was held last July.

'William Morris matters because my late socialist father gave me his name, and because Morris guides people to things of beauty and usefulness, and, I hope, a happy world without money! As some Americans recognise, Morris wants "a society that has 'naturally' become communal, non-hierarchical, agrarian, and definitely non-capitalistic".' (Nathanael Gilbert in *JWMS* 16: 1)

Arnold Morris Crockart, East Kilbride, Scotland

'William Morris matters because he advocates beauty in the production of everyday objects. Stressing workmanship and the great pleasure gained from creating beauty, he encourages individuality in determining choice. Morris recognised that progressive ideas arise from experience and cannot be imposed in art or politics.'

Ruth Frow, Salford, UK

'William Morris matters because he offers what we need as much now as in his time. He offers an ideal, the beauty of his work and thought to feed imagination and dreams; and a reality, his vision of how we might live more fully, loving life, the earth and humanity.'

L. Miller, Milton Keynes, UK

'Because who else have we in 2005? Where is our Gandhi, our Martin Luther King? Who best could lead the fight against globalisation, argue against war in Iraq, campaign to halt global warming and the

cancellation of African debt whilst easily surpassing the combined efforts of every television makeover artist?’

Nigel Pieters, Surrey, UK

‘William Morris is an unshakeable bulwark of hope to those who still believe that there *is* such a thing as society and the possibility of social progress. He remains our bright beacon of sense and vision. History has not, and will not, discredit him; his is always the last word.’

Robin Richardson, Suffolk, UK

‘The question has been most aptly answered by the late Edward Thompson, whose magnificent Morris biography concludes with the assertion that “he still paces ahead of us . . . beckoning us forward to the measureless bounty of life. He is one of those men whom history will never overtake”.’

Rob Rogers, West Sussex, UK

‘The miserable advance of Shoddy makes Morris matter. Inequity of power and wealth, wars, division of humanity, overwork, wasted labour make Morris’s humanist vision of useful, artful work desirable. Impending environmental destruction makes his love of the earth necessary. The spark he saw within ordinary humanity makes the dream achievable.’

Len Wallace, Ontario, CA

Choosing between these entries wasn’t easy. I enlisted a few members of the UK William Morris Society Committee to help me out, and the final winners – just – are Len Wallace and Robin Richardson. Poster copies of Carl S. Jung’s early-twentieth-century illustration of Morris have been dispatched. Thanks to all entrants.